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The Dreams of *Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī* and His Family in Shīʿite *Maqātil* Literature

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Abstract

The article discusses the dreams that appear in the Shīʿite maqātil *literature, especially the dreams of Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī and of his family, as well as those of other persons who accompanied him on his journey from the city of Mecca to Karbalāʾ, where he met his death. The functions that these dreams fulfill are considered, especially the dreams of Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī. They show him events that are still to happen, and they reveal his preordained fate being killed in the battle of Karbalāʾ. Each dream is described separately, and classified according to content as a verbal or a symbolic dream, and according to the time and place it occurred. The article attempts to show that the dreams in the* maqātil *literature, like dreams in classical Islamic literature, have the power of showing the future, so much so that at times they may change the course of history.*

Introduction

Ancient people attributed prophetic qualities to dreams, and consequently endeavored to interpret and understand them. It was common to turn to dream interpreters who, through their wisdom, helped explain the positive symbols revealed in the dream or to enable the dreamer to distance himself from imminent danger. The ability to interpret dreams was considered a prophetic quality. The Bible notes that the magicians and wise men

of Egypt[1] interpreted dreams. Later, Moslem priests saw themselves as interpreters of dreams by virtue of their gifts of prophecy.

The ancients differentiated between three types of dreams: nightmares, personal dreams, and vain dreams. The first type were considered worthy of interpretation because they could bear fateful tidings for the individual or the nation. Dreams of private, personal significance did not receive the same attention, and vain dreams were considered inconsequential.[2]

It should be noted that modern, rational man does not dream less, and his dreams are not different in nature from those of the ancients. Moreover, the similarity between our dreams and the creations of ancient peoples — myths — is impressive. Many dreams are similar to ancient myths both in style and content.

In Islamic literature, as in Moslem society, dreams play an distinguished role. This can be seen from the large quantity of literature dealing with dreams. Dreams are common in anthologies of *Ḥadīth*, in the literature of *Sīra*, in biographical, *'Adab* and *Sufī* literature. They appear in the literature of religious law, in commentary on the Qur'ān, and even in religious polemics.[3]

This article will deal with the significance of the dream in Islam based on the dreams of Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī and members of his family as they appear in the *Maqātil* — the extensive literature about the murder of Ḥusayn at the Battle of Karbalā'. We will open with a short survey on the nature of dreams in different cultures.

The Dream among Ancient Peoples

In the ancient world the dream was perceived as a channel of revelation, a communications medium between man and divine forces. Through the dream it was believed possible to discover facts capable of influencing reality, and the dream usually bore religious significance. Through dreams the gods revealed their wills to men in the expectation that they would act accordingly.[4]

The ancient Babylonians and Assyrians believed that dreams were caused by a superior force external to man. They believed in the existence of a god who served as the custodian of dreams. According to their understanding, this god was charged with the responsibility of inserting messages into the

[1] Genesis 41:8.
[2] Sheinfeld 1994, pp. 21-22.
[3] For more on the subject see Kinberg, 1977, p. 2.
[4] Elior 1995, p. 65.

sleeper's consciousness. Occasionally the superior power was described as an angel or a messenger of other gods.

The Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle, and their students did not believe that dreams originated with a superior force. They were of the opinion that men's thoughts and feelings constituted the cause of dreams, and that there was a continuum between wakefulness and dreaming. They also agreed that mental clarity could manifest more distinctly during a dream than during wakefulness. At the same time, some of the wise men of Greece believed that dreams were messages sent by the gods. The scholar Galen (201-131 CE), a scientist and physician who believed in the Greek god Asculapius, saw and received instruction from him in dreams. Galen attributed his ability to cure disease and perform dangerous surgery to the knowledge that the god transmitted to him in his dreams.[5]

So strong was ancient man's belief in dreams that one of the Roman Caesars sentenced to death a man who "murdered" him in a dream. Among several Indian tribes it was customary to punish a theft ostensibly committed in a dream, or for treason that took place in a dream.

Anthropologists who studied the cultures of the Ashanti of Ghana and the Maori of New Zealand report attitudes of so much respect and esteem towards dreams that members of these tribes occasionally have difficulty differentiating between dreams and reality. An account is given about an African tribal chief convinced that in a dream he traveled to Europe, and when he woke up he got dressed and prepared for the upcoming journey.[6]

Dreams in the Bible

The Bible devotes many verses to dreams and their interpretations. In the Bible dreams are one of the aspects of prophecy, a channel of revelation. Jacob saw God's angels in a dream while the Lord himself "stood beside him."[7] In the dream he receives a promise and the covenant. The dream also serves as a medium to transmit messages from heaven to earth about the future: "…what God is about to do He hath declared unto Pharaoh."[8]

Notwithstanding, the Biblical attitude towards the dream is equivocal: "If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams …."[9] On one hand a parallel is drawn between the prophet and the dream — the

[5] Sheinfeld 1994, pp. 23-29.
[6] Lincoln, 1970.
[7] Genesis 28:12-13.
[8] Genesis 41:25.
[9] Deuteronomy 13:2

dreamer of dreams is identified explicitly as a prophet. On the other hand, the prophet could be a false prophet and the sign given in the dream nothing but a test: "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, nor unto that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God putteth you to proof …."[10]

Moreover, the Bible emphasizes the difference between dreams and prophecy: "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; And he that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What hath the straw to do with the wheat? Saith the Lord."[11] There is even complete scorn for the "dreams [that] speak falsely"[12]: "For a dream cometh through a multitude of business; And a fool's voice through a multitude of words."[13] From the parallel we see that the dream is analogous to nonsense.[14]

> And he dreamed yet another dream and told it to his brethren, and said: "Behold, I have dreamed yet a dream: and, behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me."[15]

One of the best-known dreams in the Bible is Joseph's dream. When the youth Joseph tells his family his dreams they understand immediately the significance embedded in them; they do not need an interpreter. The brothers see in Joseph's dream the youth's boastfulness and ambition, his desire to rule over them — *i.e.* the dream expresses a wish; but at the same time these were prophetic dreams as well, that foretold Joseph's and his brothers' fate. The brothers scorned "this dreamer," and his father rebuked him as well: "What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? … but his father kept the saying in mind."[16]

Later Joseph gains ascendancy through his ability to interpret dreams. In the dreams of Pharaoh and his ministers, the emphasis is not on fulfillment of repressed wishes but rather on discernment of the future. The wisdom required to interpret dreams is emphasized: "'*We have dreamed a dream and there is none that can interpret it.*' And Joseph said unto them: 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it me, I pray you.'"[17] When Pharaoh dreams, the fact that "all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men"[18] are not able to interpret the dream is emphasized. After Joseph successfully interprets

[10] Deuteronomy, v. 4.
[11] Jeremiah 23:28.
[12] Zechariah 10:2.
[13] Ecclesiastes 5:2.
[14] Levin 1995, pp. 21-23.
[15] Genesis 37:9.
[16] Genesis 37:10-11.
[17] Genesis 40:8.
[18] Genesis 41:8

the dreams and his prophecy comes to pass he is considered *a man in whom the spirit of God is*[19] and attains great honor.

Joseph's dream is also mentioned in the Qur'ān and is given a broad interpretation. When Joseph tells his dream to his father, it is written, "When Joseph said unto his father, 'O my father! Lo! I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon. I saw them prostrating themselves unto me.' He said, 'O my dear son: tell not thy brethren of thy vision lest they plot a plot against thee. Lo! Satan is for man an open foe. Thus thy Lord will prefer thee and will teach thee the interpretation of events, and will perfect His grace upon thee and upon the family of Jacob as He perfected it upon the forefathers Abraham and Isaac. Lo! Thy Lord is Knower, wise."[20]

Thus the Qur'ān's interpretation of Joseph's dream is consistent with the above spirit, and adds to it. Jacob sees in his son's dream a sign from Heaven, a prophecy that fulfills itself. Not only does the dream prophesize his fate and the fate of his family; it is also a revelation of God's word, a reinforcement of the covenant between Joseph and the God of his fathers.

We will now move on to the central subject of this article, the perception of the dream in Islam.

The importance of Dreams in Islam

In Islam, the dream is believed to have prophetic authority. One may refer to it for advice and guidance, and he who see the prophet in a dream is considered as if he had seen him while awake. The prophet Muḥammad (born in Mecca in 570 and died in 632) attributed great importance to dreams, seeing in them a channel of communication between man and his God. The supreme forces transmit their wisdom through dreams, and the dreamer is entitled to use their guidance to delegate to others.

Ḥadīth literature is full of dreams of various types. Some *Ḥadīth* anthologies even encourage the dreamer to act upon his dreams and promise him that he will be able to differentiate between a good dream worthy of obedience and its opposite. Thus the prophet Muḥammad said, "If one of you sees a pleasing dream it is sent from Allah; he should thank God for the dream and tell it to others." In this way, use of dreams for the purpose of receiving guidance in life is legitimized, and indeed, there were groups in Islam that used dreams as justifications for their deeds.[21]

[19] Genesis, 38.
[20] Qur'ān, 12:4-6, translated by Pickthall n.d, p. 218.
[21] Kinberg 1991, pp. 223-224.

One can learn about the importance of dreams in Islam *inter alia* from the fact that the instructions for reading the Qur'ān are given in a dream. It is said of several personalities in Islam that they saw the prophet and received from him instruction how to read the Qur'ān, how to pronounce certain vowels, and even how to alter certain verses, in dreams. In some cases God himself is revealed to the dreamer, and in the dream instructs him to read the Qur'ān to Him.[22]

Islamic traditions see in the dream a channel of divine revelation surpassed only by prophecy; since Muḥammad was the last of the prophets, the dream is the only way that Moslems can receive transcendental guidance. In the words of the prophet, "mission and prophecy are concluded; no apostle nor prophet will come after me." When his followers told him, "O Master, and when will the good tidings come (a reference to the promised tidings in *sura* 10:64)[23] he answered them, "the tidings will come in the Moslem dream, which is part of prophecy."

It is interesting to note that this idea has a parallel in the Talmud! Despite the declared opposition of the Talmudic sages to viewing the dream a medium of prophecy and divine inspiration, they ruled, "The dream is one-sixtieth of prophecy."[24]

Moreover, the Talmud states explicitly that after prophecy ceased God was revealed to men in dreams: "The Holy One blessed be He said, 'Though I hid My face from them, I will speak to them in a dream."[25]

According to this approach, dreams can illuminate our way to the truth, bringing us closer to it than would be possible while awake; the dream experience draws us closer to the experience of prophetic revelation. He who is unable to approach the level of prophecy on his own can, through dreams, receive guidance from the prophet. The prophet appears in many dreams, based upon the tradition in which it is said, *man raʾānī fī al-manām fasayarānī fi al-yaqaẓa ʾaw fakaʾannmā raʾānī fi al-yaqaẓa* (everyone who sees me in a dream is as if he sees me while he is awake). Moreover, since Satan cannot manifest in the person of the prophet, an appearance of the prophet in a dream is destined to guide the faithful and cannot harm them. The literature of dreams notes that the dream of a God-fearing and righteous man is considered a *manām ṣāliḥ* (good dream).[26]

[22] Kinberg 1991, pp. 225-226.

[23] "Theirs are good tidings in the life of the world and in the hereafter …", *Qur'ān* 10:64 by Pickthall, n.d., p. 198.

[24] Berachot 57 b.

[25] Bavli, Hagigah 5 b.

[26] Kinberg 1977, pp. 11-13. See also Goldziher 1912, pp. 77-79.

Types of Dreams

In Islamic literature, dreams may be classified by categories, as does the scholar Leah Kinberg. She sorts dreams into symbolic dreams and literal dreams.[27]

Kinberg states that there is a vast difference between the two types. Dreams of the former type are vague and mysterious, and in order to understand them one must call upon the help of an interpreter. Sometimes a symbolic dream interprets itself through a divine voice, a *hātif*, which emerges and interprets it. Dreams of this type fall on the boundary between dreams and visions.

In the literal dream there is a clear message, it contains a declaration or conversation — usually between two deceased people or between a living man and a dead man, or though a voice that speaks to the dreamer. On occasion the dreamer receives instructions in the dream, and he can follow them without needing to refer to an interpreter. Sometimes dreams of this type include allegories or abstract ideas embodied in characters that appear in the dream. An ugly woman, for example, might represent distress or disease, while a beautiful woman would represent beauty and goodness. Even in the literal dream some symbols appear, but unlike the symbolic dream they are clear and explicit.

The need to receive guidance in the dream with respect to steps and decisions to be taken while awake led to an understanding that not only was an appearance by the prophet in a dream deemed a good sign, but any appearance of a "guest" from the other world brings a truth that should be taken into consideration. The dream was understood as a type of connection, a meeting between the living and the dead. The faithful believe that the soul of the dreamer rises to heaven and consorts with the souls of the dead, and *vice versa*; the dead might return to the world of the living in order to meet their loved ones. Many stories open with the words, "someone came to me in a dream."

According to this understanding, anyone that appears in a dream comes from the next world, the world of truth, and thus speaks the truth. It is simple to differentiate between the deceptive dream and the true one, as "Satan tends not to appear in dreams." Thus a dream acquired legitimacy as a truth among the Moslems, and meetings with the dead in the dream are perceived as a way to become acquainted with the truth.

[27] Kinberg 1977, pp. 7-8, 11-12. See also: Kinberg 1986, pp. 295.

The Dream in Maqātil Literature

Maqātil is a literary genre describing the manner of the dramatic killing of Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī in the year 680 by his Ummayad rivals at Karbalā'. This literary genre first appeared in the eighth century, and is in use to this day. Most *Maqātil* is prose, though poetic rhyme can be found in it.

In addition to the story of the killing of Ḥusayn, *Maqātil* includes such chacracters as angels and demons that offer to assist Ḥusayn, prophets that eulogize him and comfort his family, nature's lamentation for Ḥusayn, and more. *Maqātil* also makes repeated use of expressions and images mostly taken from the battlefield. These elements became typical motifs in Shīʿite *Maqātil* literature.

Among the repeating motifs, a substantial number are dreams. In the *Maqātil Ḥusayn* one can find dozens of dreams appearing in one form or another:

1. The dreams that were dreamed by Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī;
2. The dreams dreamed by his family: Ḥusayn's daughter Sukayna, the prophet's wife 'Umm Salama, Ḥusayn's cousin Muslim Ibn ʿAqīl, the prophet's cousin Ibn ʿAbās, and Ibn ʿAbās's wife Lubāba bint al-Ḥārith.
3. The dreams of people who are not members of Ḥusayn's family: Yazīd's servant girl, the king of Byzantium's messenger to Yazīd, and two sheikhs who were punished in a dream for their part in killing Ḥusayn.

All these dreams play an important part and are of considerable influence in the *Maqātil*. This is especially true of Ḥusayn's dreams, as they prophesize the events about to take place and disclose the fate that awaits him.

Ḥusayn's Dreams

The *Maqātil* describe four dreams that Ḥusayn dreamed. Two of them appear in the *Maqātil 'Abu Mikhnaf*;[28] and the two others in *Maqātil Ibn Tāwūs*[29] and *Maqātil Ibn Namā.*[30] These *Maqātil* were composed between 774 and 1266 at the beginning of the development of Shīʿite *Maqātil* literature and constitute a representative sample of this literary genre.

[28] *'Abu Mikhnaf* 1974, pp. 15, 39.
[29] *Ibn Tāwūs* 1929, p. 51
[30] *Ibn Namā* 1899, p. 14

Ḥusayn's four dreams have in common a character from the other world that reveals to Ḥusayn his imminent death. In the first three dreams the character is the prophet; and in the fourth the messenger is a man on horseback.

The first dream was dreamed in Medina where Ḥusayn was visiting his grandfather's grave. In his dream he sees the apostle of Allah standing before him, greeting him and saying to him, "O my son, your father and your mother and your brothers have already joined me, and they are in the Garden of Eden. We all yearn for you; make haste to join us. Know that an exalted position awaits you in the Garden of Eden, and you will be illuminated with the light of Allah. You will be worthy of this exalted position only through a martyr's death."[31]

At the end of the dream the apostle of God says to Ḥusayn, "How soon you will join us!" (*mā'aqrab qudūmaka 'ilaynā*).[32]

The second dream was also dreamed in Medina by the grave of the prophet, when Ḥusayn visited his grandfather before he sent out for Iraq. He fell on the grave and cried bitterly until he fell into a deep sleep, and dreamed that he saw his grandfather Muḥammad, apostle of Allah, who said to him, "O my son, hurry; make haste to join us, for we yearn for you and long to see you" (*al-ʿajal al-ʿajal al-waḥā al-waḥā fabādir 'ilaynā fanaḥnu mushtāqūn 'ilayka*).

In the third dream, which Ḥusayn told to one of his sisters, he dreamed, "a few minutes ago I saw my grandfather Muḥammad, my father ʿAlī, my mother Fāṭima, and my brother Ḥasan, and they told me 'Indeed, Ḥusayn, you will join us soon.'"[33]

The fourth dream differs from the other three in that the image appearing is not the prophet but rather a horseman, who approaches him and says to him and his friends, "You, Ḥusayn, your supporters and your family are walking ahead on on the way, and death is walking and accompanying you" (*ra'aytu fārisan yusūyirunā wayaqūl al-qawmu yasīrūn walmanāyā tasīru maʿahum*).[34] This image is also a harbinger of what is to come.

If we examine Ḥusayn's four dreams we will see that all of them are of the literal type. They are short, simple and clear. There is no need for an interpreter to interpret them. At the same time they are of great importance, falling into the category of prophecy. We will examine some of the elements that appear in these dreams.

[31] *'Abu Mikhnaf* 1971, pp. 15-16.
[32] *'Abu Mikhnaf* 1971, p. 39.
[33] *Ibn Tāwūs* 1929, p. 51.
[34] *Ibn Namā* 1899, p. 14.

The Time and Location of the Dream

The place is stated explicitly in the dreams: The first two Ḥusayn dreams in Medina by the grave of his grandfather the prophet; the third is dreamed on the way, at ʿUdhayb al-Hijānāt, and the fourth dream he dreams on the battlefield itself, at Karbalā'.

The time is not specified in three of the four dreams. Only in the second dream is it known that it is dreamt at dawn — an important detail because of the well-known tradition spoken by the prophet: "A dream that appears to the dreamer at dawn is a true dream."[35]

The Appearance of the Prophet in the Dream

In the first three dreams the prophet appears and speaks to Ḥusayn. He tells him how much his family — ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan — yearns for him; announces that he will join them soon; and that an exalted position awaits him in the Garden of Eden enveloped in the light of the Master of the World. He will be worthy of this position only after his martyr's death. The prophet asks Ḥusayn to hurry to join his family in the Garden of Eden.[36]

The prophet is not described in these dreams. We do not know how he looks, what he is wearing or any other detail about him. His only task is to guide and direct Ḥusayn, to help him to take decisions, and to clarify how he must act in order to reach the state destined for him in the Garden of Eden. The prophet also furnishes Ḥusayn with information about his future and his fate. All four of Ḥusayn's dreams are perceived as true. Their purpose is to transmit clearly to Ḥusayn the message that his death is imminent and that he is about to join the family of saints in the Garden of Eden. The dream serves as a tool to convey information about what is about to happen.

We can find another interpretation of Ḥusayn's dreams in the words of Aristotle, Plato's student. In his book *Prophecy in Dreams* he writes that on occasion one may achieve greater clarity of mind in a dream than that which waking thought permits. Aristotle also stressed the continuum between dreaming and wakeful states, a continuum through which dreams can influence waking life. It is possible that Ḥusayn knew in his heart that he was near death, and his mental clarity and the sharpness of his feelings made the dream possible; and for this reason he saw what he saw.

[35] Fahd 1959, pp. 140-142.
[36] Sindawi 2000, p. 158.

History tells us of many instances in which men observed their deaths in dreams. President Lincoln had such an experience. Two days before his murder in 1885 Abraham Lincoln dreamed of his death. He told it to his associates but attributed to it no importance. Two days later the president was murdered in his theatre box.

Muslim Ibn ʿAqīl Ibn ʾAbū Tālib (660-680), Ḥusayn's cousin, also dreamed of the end of the battle, when he received an oath of fealty to Ḥusayn from 18,000 men of Kūfa. When Muslim's act became known to Kūfa's governor, ʿUbaydallah Ibn Ziyād, he sent a pursuit party after him. Muslim fled and hid, and at the time of his flight he dreamed the following dream.

Muslim Ibn ʿAqil's Dream

In the dream Muslim's cousin ʿAlī Ibn ʾAbū Tālib, the emir of the faithful, appeared to him and said to him: "Make haste, make haste." When he awoke Muslim said, "I have no doubt that my life is at an end."[37]

Muslim Ibn ʿAqīl's dream is very short. This dream is also literal, without symbols. It is totally clear and does not require interpretation. ʿAlī Ibn ʾAbū Tālib, who appeared to Muslim in his dream, announces to him that in the near future he will join him in the Garden of Eden. Here also the meeting in the dream between the living and the dead fulfills a prophetic role.

The motif of premonition of death appears frequently in the dreams of the members of Ḥusayn's family as well, as it does in the following dream.

ʾUmm Salama's Dream

On the night after Ḥusayn was killed, ʾUmm Salama, the wife of the prophet, saw her husband the prophet in a dream, with signs of dust on his head and beard. She asked him, "Shall I be your ransom (*juʿiltu fidāka*)? What is this dust that I see on your head and beard?" He answered her, "O ʾUmm Salama, I have just returned from burying my son Ḥusayn." ʾUmm Salama said, "I awoke from my sleep with dread, and after a few minutes I heard the sound of a great noise; I asked my servant girl to find out what caused the noise, and when the servant left the house she heard the field eulogizing Ḥusayn.[38]

[37] *ʾAbu Mikhnaf* 1971, p. 32.

[38] *ʾAbu Mikhnaf* 1971, p. 116. See also: *Khawārizm* 1948, p. 94. About ʾUmm Salama's premonition of Ḥusayn's killing, through a handful of dust that the prophet left with her, see the motif of premonition, Sindawi 2000, p. 234.

ʾUmm Salama's dream is short and also belongs to the literal type; she dreamed it in Medina on ʿĀshūrāʾ Day. When ʾUmm Salama awoke from her dream she discovered that Ḥusayn had indeed been killed. In this case the dream came to reveal to the dreamer the death of her grandson Ḥusayn.

Ibn ʿAbbās' Dream

ʿAbdallah Ibn ʿAbbās Ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 687), known as Ibn ʿAbbās, was the prophet's cousin. He dreamed his dream in Medina; in the dream he saw the prophet at noon with his hair wild and tangled, his face gray and the color of dust, holding a bottle of blood in his hand. Ibn ʿAbbās asked him: "What is this blood?" and the prophet answered, "This is the blood of Ḥusayn, I began to collect it starting from today."[39]

When Ibn ʿAbbās awoke he counted the days since he had left Ḥusayn and Hijaz and he realized that Ḥusayn had been killed the same day. This dream is also short and literal, not necessitating consultation with a dream interpreter. The prophet appearing in the dream interprets the story of the bottle and its contents, and announces the future.

Lubāba bint al-Ḥārith's Dream

The purpose of this dream is also to offer information about what is about to happen; this time not about the death of Ḥusayn but rather about his birth:

> Lubāba bint al-Ḥārith, known as ʾUmm al-Faḍl, (d. 650), was the wife of Al-ʿAbbās Ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. She told: "Before the birth of Ḥusayn I dreamed a dream, as if a piece of the flesh of the body of the apostle of Allah was cut off from him and brought to my room." When she awoke Lubāba told the dream to the apostle of Allah and he told her: "If your dream is true, your daughter Fāṭima will bear a son and I will bring him to you to nurse."[40]

This dream is different from its predecessors in that is a symbolic dream. This dream contains symbols that were not at all clear to the dreamer. In order to understand it, Lubāba turned to the prophet, requesting that he explain it to her. In turning to the prophet with a request to interpret the dream Lubāba acknowledges that the prophet is blessed with a special gift to interpret symbolic dreams.

[39] Khawārizm 1948, p. 94.

[40] Ibn Namā 1899, p. 5. The prophet was considered to be the most accurate interpreter of dreams. On the qualities of an accurate dream interpreter, see Kinberg, 1971, p. 8.

Premonition in the Dreams of Ḥusayn

We have seen above that Ḥusayn dreamed his dreams while visiting the grave of his grandfather the prophet Muḥammad in Medina, and as he stood by the grave he saw the prophet and heard from his lips the fate that awaited him. Did Ḥusayn believe the dream? Did he know that he was about to die? The facts of the matter are unclear. Though his foreseen death was shown to him in the dream, when he awoke Ḥusayn declared his intention to go to Iraq, to the very place where he had seen in his dream that he would be killed. He also announced to the crowd that gathered around him that it was decreed that he would die and that the time and place of his death were known to him. At the end of his speech Ḥusayn said, "I see the wolves tearing my limbs from my body at Karbalā'."[41]

On one hand Ḥusayn recognizes that his life will end, and on the other hand he takes no steps to defend himself, nor does he follow the advice of his entourage — his brothers and family members — not to go to Iraq.[42] Moreover, when the angels reveal themselves to him on the way to Iraq — and afterwards demons too — and offer him their help in his war against the Umayyads, he rejects their offers as one who is certain that nothing can alter his fate. When he arrives at Karbalā' he says, "O God, I look here in sadness and at disaster (*karb wa-balā'*), for here will our blood be spilled, here is our burial place, about this place I heard from my grandfather."[43]

Thus Ḥusayn knows that he is about to die. Did he choose to ignore the warnings of his grandfather the prophet and go to the place of danger despite everything because he attributed no importance to his dream? Ḥusayn's faithful followers do not believe so. On the contrary, Ḥusayn accepted with befitting gravity the appearance of his grandfather in the dream but saw in it his fate and purpose. He continued towards Karbalā' and the events that brought about his death not despite the warnings of his grandfather in the dream, but rather because of them.

Dreams of Mourning and Lamentation for the Death of Ḥusayn

Sukayna was Ḥusayn's daughter by his wife Rabāb bint 'Imri'u al-Qays al-Kindiyya. She told this dream to Khalif Yazīd when the convoy of women prisoners arrived at Damascus.

[41] Khawārizm 1948, p. 5. See also, Ibn Namā 1899, p. 30.
[42] *'Abū Mikhnaf* 1971, p. 39.
[43] *'Abu Mikhnaf* 1971, p. 77.

"Know that last night I dreamed a dream. In my dream I saw a palace of light, with balconies built with precious stones of various colors (*shurufatuhu min yāqūt*). Suddenly a door opened, and five sheikhs departed through it, led by a handsome young man (*waṣīf*). I approached him and asked him, 'For whom is this palace?' He answered, "This palace is for your father.' And when I asked about the five sheikhs accompanying him, he answered, 'These are the five prophets: ʾÁdam, Nūḥ, ʾIbrāhīm, ʿĪsā and Mūsā, may they rest in peace.'[44]

"During our conversation there suddenly entered a man of gloomy countenance and he was as pale as the moon, as if he carried all the troubles of the world on his shoulders, and he was clutching his beard. I asked the young man, 'Who is this?' He answered, 'this is your grandfather Muḥammad the apostle of Allah.' I drew near to him and said to him, "O Grandfather, our men have already been killed, our babies slaughtered, and the honor of our women violated.' He bent towards me, held me to his breast and wept loudly. Then came the five prophets, ʾÁdam, Nūḥ, ʾIbrāhīm, Mūsā, and ʿĪsā, and said to me, 'O daughter of the chosen, please lower your voice, for you are causing anguish to the heart of our lord the apostle of Allah.'

"The young man grasped my hand and drew me into the palace. I saw before me five women, one of them with hair flowing over her shoulders, dressed in black, and in her hand a shirt dipped in blood. When she arose, the other four women rose with her; and when she sat they sat. She poured dirt on her face and head (*taḥthu al-turāb ʿalā raʾsihā*). I asked the young man, 'Who are these women?' and he answered, 'These are Eve, Miriam, Asia the mother of Mūsā, Khadīja [the prophet's first wife], and this woman woman holding the shirt in her hand is your grandmother Fāṭima.'

"I approached her and said, 'O Grandmother, I swear to you that my father was killed and I was orphaned young.' Fāṭima hugged me, and held me close to her breast and said to me, 'I grieve to hear this.' Then Fāṭima burst into tears and asked me many questions: 'O my beloved, who washed Ḥusayn's face, who dressed him in his shroud, who prayed over him, who prepared his body for burial, who carried his coffin on his shoulder, who dug his grave, who covered the grave with dirt, who took upon himself the care of his widows and orphans?' Then Fāṭima called out loudly, 'O my son, my son, O the fruit of my heart.' At that moment all four of the women accompanying her burst into tears. Finally Fāṭima parted from me, weeping. I awoke stunned; the parting from Fāṭima made my pain more acute.'"[45]

[44] *ʾAbu Mikhnaf* 1971, pp. 138-139.

[45] *ʾAbu Mikhnaf* 1971, pp. 139-140. The translation of the dreams into English is taken from the Sindawi's doctoral thesis, *The Maqātil in Shīʿite Literature.*

Unlike the earlier dreams, Sukayna's dream in Damascus, as told to the Khalif Yazīd is long and detailed. Nevertheless it belongs to the second type of dream, the literal type that does not require consultation with a dream interpreter to understand it. Still, it contains allusions and symbols such as the palace of light — the light of God — and the balconies built of precious stones of many colors; the symbols are interpreted in the dream itself by the handsome young man appearing in the dream and offering explanations for the allusions and symbols that appear in it.

This dream was dreamed after the death of Ḥusayn; thus the motif of premonition is absent. In its place the pain and mourning over the death of the leader are evident. In the following dream as well, the dream of Yazīd's servant girl, lamentations for Ḥusayn are described, and here also the prophets and apostles in the Garden of Eden eulogize him.

The Dream of Yazīd's Servant Girl

Yazīd's servant girl told her master the dream that she dreamed when the convoy of women prisoners arrived at his court together with the dead Ḥusayn's head. She said,

> "In my dream I looked toward heaven and suddenly the gate of heaven opened and I saw a ladder of light stretching from heaven to earth. Two young men without the mark of a beard, dressed in green, descended the ladder; and a carpet of topaz (*zabarjad*) of the precious stones of the Garden of Eden spread out before them. Light flooded the carpet from every direction. Suddenly a man with a round head approached and sat in the center of the carpet and called out 'O Father 'Ádam,' and immediately 'Ádam descended from heaven to earth. Another other called out 'O Father 'Ibrāhīm,' and immediately 'Ibrāhīm descended from heaven to earth. Then he called out 'O Brother 'Īsā' and immediately 'Īsā' descended from heaven to earth. Afterwards I saw a woman standing, unloosening her hair and calling, 'O Mother Eve, come down, O Mother Khadīja come down, O Mother Hāgar come down, O Sister Sara come down, O Sister Miriam come down,' and all of them descended to earth. Then a divine voice said 'This is Fāṭima al-Zahrā', daughter of Muḥammad the chosen, wife of 'Alī the pleased, mother of the lord of the martyrs, who was killed at Karbalā'. Then Fāṭima called out and said, 'O Father, do you see what your people have done to your son Ḥusayn?'[46]
>
> "The apostle of Allah wept and said, 'Do you see what the oppressors have done to my son?' 'Ádam and all those present with him also wept, as did the angels. Afterwards I saw many men surrounding the head and a voice was heard saying, 'Take the master of this house and burn him with fire.' You,

[46] *'Abu Mikhnaf* 1971, p. 135.

> Yazīd, burst out of the house, calling loudly, 'Beware of the fire, beware of the fire, where shall I flee from the fire?'"[47]

As soon as the servant girl finished speaking Yazīd commanded that her head be cut off. It should be noted that at that time it was a prevalent belief that common people did not dream. If a slave dreamed a dream, it was presumed to be a message from his masters; thus it is possible that Yazīd was frightened of his servant's dream, seeing his own fears and guilt revealed in it.

This dream is relatively long, and is of the literal type. Its message and significance are totally clear and an interpreter is not needed to explain it. This dream contains a meeting between the living and the dead, prophets and apostles, and its purpose is to show how much the holy prophets cherished Ḥusayn and how great was their shock when they learned of his death.

Dreams as Punishment and Revenge

Another type of dream is that through which the death of Ḥusayn is avenged: the dreamer gets his just desserts in a dream for the killing of Ḥusayn or for cruelty to him or his family. The dream of sheikh that went blind is of this type.

Ibn Riyāḥ said, "I met a blind man who witnessed the killing of Ḥusayn. When I asked him the reason for his blindness he answered, 'I was one of the ten that participated in killing Ḥusayn but I didn't shoot him, and when Ḥusayn was killed I returned home and said the evening prayer. During my sleep I dreamed a dream, and in my dream a man approached me and told me that the apostle of Allah is calling me and asked me to respond to his call. I asked the man, 'What have I to do with the apostle of Allah?' then he grabbed me by the throat, pulled me by my collar and dragged me to him.

Suddenly I found myself standing opposite the prophet Muḥammad in the midst of the desert, his two arms exposed, the point of a spear in his hand, and an angel standing opposite him held in his hand a sword of fire. The angel had already killed nine of my friends who had participated in the killing of Ḥusayn, and every time that the angel struck, the souls of my nine friends went up in flames.

I approached the apostle of Allah and went down on my knees before him and greeted him, but he did not return my greeting. After that the

[47] *ʾAbu Mikhnaf* 1971, pp. 135-136.

prophet raised his head and said to me, 'O enemy of Allah, you desecrated my honor and killed my family and offspring and did not keep my merit, you have done what you have done.' I answered him, 'I swear by Allah, O apostle of Allah, that I did not strike with the sword and I did not pierce him at all with the spear, and I did not shoot any shot with the bow,' then the prophet answered me, 'You speak truly, but in the battle against my family you increased the number of those wearing black, the dress of mourning (*katharta al-sawād*).'

"Then the prophet commanded me to draw near to him, and when I did so I saw before me a large copper bowl full of blood. The prophet said to me, 'This is the blood of my son Ḥusayn,' and daubed my eyes with the blood in the bowl. When I awoke I discovered that I was blind and I cannot see anything."[48]

The name of the dreamer is not mentioned, and we know only that he is an old sheikh. This dream is intended as a punishment and revenge against the man that participated in the killing of Ḥusayn. It is interesting that the punishment the dreamer observes in his dream is fulfilled when he awakes.

The following is another version of this type of dream.

"An old man stinking of pitch would sit with us. When we asked him for the reason, the old man answered, 'I was among those that deprived Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī of water, and once in my sleep I dreamed a dream in which I saw it was as if the Creator had resurrected all the people and assembled them together. Then I was thirsty and felt a strong urge to drink and asked for water; then suddenly I saw the prophet Muḥammad together with ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, may they rest in peace, standing around a spring (*al-ḥawḍ*). I asked the apostle of Allah for permission to drink and he said to his family, 'let him drink' but none of them responded. Again the apostle of Allah requested that they allow me to drink and again they did not accede to his request, and so it happened a third time.

Then those present said to the prophet, 'O apostle of Allah, the man standing before you requesting to drink water is among a group of men that deprived Ḥusayn of water. The prophet said, 'If so, let him drink pitch.' The old man added, 'From that time until this moment I urinate pitch, and all food that I eat tastes of pitch, and every beverage that I drink reeks of pitch.[49]

This dream also describes a punishment for a man that took part in the killing of Ḥusayn, and here also the punishment that he sees in the dream

[48] *Ibn Tāwūs* 1929, pp. 76-77.
[49] Khawārizm 1948, pp. 103-104.

is fulfilled when he awakens. There are other dreams of this type, in which the dreamer is blinded in the dream and when he wakes up he discovers that he is really blind. It is noteworthy that reward and punishment assured or granted to the dreamer are common in dreams in Islam.[50]

Summary

The ability to reveal the future is attributed to dreams in general and dreams in Islam in particular. Occasionally this power is so strong that it can change the course of history. Some say that before the archduke of Austria Franz Ferdinand departed for Sarajevo in June 1914 one of his courtiers dreamed that the archduke was destined to be murdered there. The dreamer attempted in vain to persuade the archduke to cancel the journey. Had the heir to the throne believed in dreams it is possible that he would not have been murdered, and World War I would not have broken out! Likewise, if Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī had listened to the warnings transmitted through his dreams it is possible that he would not have continued on to Karbalā'. As we know, Ḥusayn's murder brought in its wake fierce conflicts between his faction, the Shīʿite faction, and the Sunnis responsible for the murder. These conflicts continued for many generations and exist to this day.

The faith and guidance provided in dreams might therefore have altered the development of Islam, upon which the murder of Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī had such an enormous impact.

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[50] For more on this subject see Kinberg 1986, pp. 298-301. See also Malti-Douglas 1980, p. 155.

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